

Recognizing the Community of Burns, Kansas

August 15, 2006

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the citizens of Burns, Kansas for continuing efforts to sustain and revitalize their community.

With a population of approximately 450, the citizens of Burns and the surrounding area demonstrate pride in their community through action.

Over the course of many years, steps have been taken to ensure that the future of Burns is a bright one.

In October of 2002, ground was broken on a new community center. With assistance from the Kansas Department of Commerce Kan-Step Program, the building was completed in March of 2003. During that five-month period, crews of volunteers worked on the center on a daily basis. Cabinets and More, a local business, volunteered more than 300 hours of labor to build and install cabinets. A donation of \$18,000 was made by the Burns school alumni for window blinds

and furniture. Twenty tables and 200 chairs were provided at cost-saving the community \$7,000. The end result is a building that sports a wellness center, youth room, a place for seniors to quilt and a great kitchen. The center is constantly reserved for civic events and private gatherings. Carolyn Koehn, former city clerk and coordinator of the community center project, believes the facility demonstrates a collective willingness to enhance Burns' quality of life--today and for future generations. "This project would have not succeeded without the culture of volunteerism and the acceptance of change and new ideas in the Burns community," Koehn said.

More recently, residents banded together to transform the former post office into a new community library and city hall. Grant funding from USDA Rural Development covered \$50,000 of the project expense. Impressively, more than \$95,000 was raised by the Burns Public Library Board from private sources. Approximately half that amount came from local and area residents. The fundraising effort consisted of phone calls, an ice cream social by the Burns United Methodist Church and an 800 letter fundraising campaign. The new city hall and library was completed in May of 2006. Barb Stuhlsatz, library board president, is excited by the additional opportunities that the new facility affords area residents. "We now have a state-of-the-art library that provides reading programs, GED assistance and computer access to residents of Burns and the surrounding area," Stuhlsatz said.

The Burns PRIDE committee is always searching for ways to promote the community. Sandy Heyman, a committee member, came up with a unique way to achieve this goal. She initiated the sale of two-foot tall concrete roosters to local businesses and residents. Upon sale, the roosters were then creatively decorated. In May of 2004, Burns hosted its first ever Rooster Parade. In all, more than 60 roosters have been sold, decorated and are on display. In recognition of the project's success, the local Lions Club has purchased a four-foot rooster that serves as a welcome sign on the way into town. Sandy is proud of how the roosters have united her hometown. "It is amazing how many people participated in the project," Heyman said. "The roosters really brought people together."

Additional art can be found in the Prairie Arts store, an arts and crafts mall that attracts visitors from across the country. A local group of artists and craftsmen organized the business, which displays intricate wheat weavings, beautiful quilts, handcrafted wood items and much more. The arts and crafts mall is one of more than 20 businesses that call the Burns area home. □

Local residents developed a new memorial park, which includes a pavilion, picnic tables, walking path, horseshoe pit, basketball goal and restroom. In addition, volunteers installed new city street signs, made improvements to the local ball field and constructed a new gazebo.

Since 1954, families in Burns have hosted international students in their homes over the Thanksgiving holiday. The program was initiated by Betty Grimwood and Bonnie Lohrentz, who thought it would be great if foreign students could experience rural, American culture. In recognition of how thoroughly the community embraced the idea, Burns received a Distinguished Service Award from the Institute of International Education in 1959. The award was presented by then Vice President Richard Nixon. Over the last 52 years, more than 60 local families have served as student hosts. In excess of 500 people representing 110 countries have visited Burns. Today, local resident Tom Grimwood carries on his mother's international legacy. Tom and his wife Nedy teach Spanish and Italian at American companies. They also welcome foreign students into their home every Thanksgiving. Tom is proud of the reputation that the program has developed over the years. "One of our students told us that Burns is the smallest town with the biggest diplomatic service in the world," Grimwood said.

In her 21 years as a resident, Mayor Mary Glenn has witnessed first hand how her community pulls together in order to achieve a goal. "All of our accomplishments are made possible because of a tremendous volunteer effort," Glenn said.

Stuhlsatz knows that her hometown is special. "The people of Burns are awesome," Stuhlsatz said. "They are like a family and whether they still live here or not, they work together to keep Burns a place you want to come home to."

For rural communities to survive and prosper into the future, citizens must be willing to create their own opportunities for success. Ongoing efforts to revitalize Burns are an example of how hard work, vision and community support can create such opportunities.

Citizens throughout Kansas are working together to enhance the quality of life in their communities. Burns is a success story that demonstrates how teamwork and creative thinking can make a positive difference in rural America.